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300707Z Jul 02

2002HOCHI00779 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ0391

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ACTION EAP-00

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| INFO | LOG-00  | NP-00   | AGRE-00 | AID-00  | CEA-01  | CIAE-00 | CTME-00 |
|      | DINT-00 | DODE-00 | DOEE-00 | ITCE-00 | DATE-00 | SRPP-00 | EB-00   |
|      | EXME-00 | E-00    | FAAE-00 | FBIE-00 | UTED-00 | FDRE-01 | VC-00   |
|      | FRB-00  | H-01    | TEDE-00 | INR-00  | IO-00   | ITC-01  | L-00    |
|      | VCE-00  | AC-01   | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 | NSF-01  | OES-01  | OIC-02  |
|      | OMB-01  | OPIC-01 | PER-00  | PM-00   | PRS-00  | ACE-00  | SP-00   |
|      | IRM-00  | STR-00  | TEST-00 | TRSE-00 | USIE-00 | EPAE-00 | PMB-00  |
|      | DRL-02  | G-00    | NFAT-00 | SAS-00  | /013W   |         |         |

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6588  
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY  
USDOC WASHDC  
ASEAN COLLECTIVE  
USDA WASHDC  
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000779

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, EAP/PD  
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR OES/ETC AND USAID  
USDA FOR FAS/FAA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: EAID ECON EAGR SENV VM  
SUBJECT: OFDA TAX DOLLARS AT WORK: ALLEVIATING SOME  
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OF THE MISERY IN VIETNAM'S MEKONG DELTA

REF: A) HANOI 1024

11. (U) SUMMARY: AN OFDA-FUNDED DISASTER RELIEF PROJECT HAS BROUGHT A SMALL MEASURE OF RELIEF TO POVERTY-STRICKEN MEKONG DELTA FAMILIES, HARD HIT BY DROUGHT AND FOREST FIRES IN KIEN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM. THESE COMMUNITIES EKE OUT A MARGINAL EXISTENCE AROUND THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL PARK, WHICH IS ITSELF THREATENED BY POACHING AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE POLICY DECISIONS.  
END SUMMARY.

USAID DISASTER ASSISTANCE

12. (U) ON JULY 17, AMBASSADOR BURGHARDT AND AN EMBASSY/CONSULATE GENERAL TEAM (DPO, ECONOFF, FSN POL/ECON ASSISTANT, OFDA OFFICER/MANILA, AND A PRIVATE WATER MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT) OBSERVED THE STARK AFTERMATH OF DROUGHT AND FIRE IN THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL PARK IN KIEN GIANG PROVINCE. THE AMBASSADOR HAD DECLARED THIS AREA ELIGIBLE FOR DISASTER RELIEF AFTER FIRES LAST MARCH BURNED DOWN MORE THAN 2300 HECTARES, REDUCING THE COMPLEX FOREST ECOSYSTEM TO BURNT PEAT AND CHARRED LOGS.

13. (U) AT THE AMBASSADOR'S REQUEST, USAID/OFDA PROVIDED USD 50,000 FOR DISASTER RELIEF. THE OFDA FUNDS PROVIDED FRESH DRINKING WATER, ESTABLISHED INCOME-GENERATING PROJECTS IN AQUACULTURE, BEE KEEPING, AND UNCLASSIFIED

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BROOM-MAKING, AND DEVELOPED A WATER SANITATION/ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN. IN ADDITION TO THE OFDA DISASTER RELIEF PROJECT, CARE INTERNATIONAL ALSO MANAGES A FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM NEAR THE U MINH THUONG PARK TO PROVIDE MICRO-LOANS AND CREDIT, IMPROVE VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE, CONDUCT AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH, AND REFOREST PARK AREAS.

THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL PARK

14. (U) THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL PARK (UMT) COVERS 8000 HECTARES OF MARSHLANDS AND "MELALEUCA" FOREST TO THE CAMBODIAN BORDER. "MELALEUCA" IS AN INDIGENOUS TREE IN KIEN GIANG AND GROWS IN THE HIGHLY ACIDIC PEAT SOIL HERE. IN 1993, THE GVN DESIGNATED UMT AS A NATURE RESERVE TO PRESERVE ITS THREATENED PLANT AND ANIMAL

SPECIES, SOME OF WHICH ARE ABSOLUTELY UNIQUE TO THIS AREA. IN ADDITION TO HOSTING RARE TREES AND FERNS, UMT IS THE ONLY REMAINING PEAT SWAMP FOREST ECOSYSTEM IN VIETNAM. THE AREA IS ALSO ONE OF THE LAST TWO REMAINING HABITATS IN THE WORLD FOR THE ENDANGERED HAIRY-NOSED OTTER, AND CONTAINS THE LARGEST WATER BIRD COLONY IN VIETNAM.

QUESTIONABLE LOGIC: RESETTLING A LANDLESS POPULATION AROUND A NATURE RESERVE

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**15.** (U) SHORTLY AFTER THE UMT RESERVE WAS CREATED IN 1993, THE GVN MOVED 3160 PREVIOUSLY LANDLESS HOUSEHOLDS  
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(APPROXIMATELY 17,000 PEOPLE) INTO A 13,000-HECTARE BUFFER ZONE. THE GVN GAVE EACH FAMILY FOUR HECTARES OF LAND FOR RICE PRODUCTION AND SMALL-SCALE AQUACULTURE. IN RETURN FOR THE LAND, EACH HOUSEHOLD MUST REPAY THE GVN USD 2,000 IN SEVEN YEARS (ALTHOUGH THE PAYMENT SCHEDULE IS FLEXIBLE), AND GROW ONE HECTARE OF "MELALEUCA" TREES, THUS REDUCING THEIR AVAILABLE LAND TO THREE HECTARES. IN ADDITION, THE FAMILIES MUST ALSO PROTECT THE CORE ZONE FROM BEING ILLEGALLY HARVESTED.

**16.** (U) THE ALLOCATION OF FOUR HECTARES OF FERTILE FARMLAND TO PREVIOUSLY LANDLESS FARMERS GENERATED HIGH EXPECTATIONS, BUT IT APPEARS MOST DREAMS HAVE YET TO BE FULFILLED. THE WOODEN OR BAMBOO HOUSES, MANY WITH THATCHED ROOFS AND WALLS OF PLASTIC SACKING, CONTAIN THE BAREST ESSENTIALS AND WERE LITTLE MORE THAN SEMI-ENCLOSED RAIN SHELTERS. KITCHEN, BATHING AND RESTROOM FACILITIES CONSIST OF PLATFORMS OVER THE CANALS THAT CRISSCROSS THE BUFFER ZONE. RESIDENTS LOOKED GAUNT AND TIRED. A FORMER TECHNICAL ADVISOR TO UMT PARK SAID THAT BUFFER ZONE RESIDENTS OFTEN FAIL AT FARMING AND LEASE THEIR PROPERTY TO OTHERS, BECOMING SQUATTERS ON THEIR OWN LAND.

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ACTION EAP-00

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|      | NFAT-00 | SAS-00  |         | /013W   |         |         |         |

-----D1E5B9 300827Z /38

P 300707Z JUL 02  
FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
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UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000779

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OF THE MISERY IN VIETNAM'S MEKONG DELTA

BUT THERE ARE PLANS FOR A WAR MEMORIAL IN UMT PARK

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**17.** (SBU) THE GVN RECENTLY ANNOUNCED A PLAN TO DEVELOP A SECTION OF THE CORE ZONE AS A WAR MEMORIAL AND TOURISM SITE. CARE INTERNATIONAL STAFF FEAR THAT THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION WILL DAMAGE U MINH THUONG'S ECOSYSTEM AND FACILITATE POACHING. THEY HAVE URGED THE KIEN GIANG PROVINCE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE TO COMPLETE AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE ROAD, AS REQUIRED UNDER VIETNAM'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAW. TO DATE, THE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE HAS NOT ISSUED AN ASSESSMENT, WHICH SOME CARE STAFF MEMBERS ATTRIBUTE TO THE NATIONAL-LEVEL POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE MEMORIAL.

**18.** (U) COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE MEKONG DELTA PROVIDES APPROXIMATELY 30 PERCENT OF VIETNAM'S RICE HARVEST, CERTAIN AREAS, INCLUDING THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL

PARK, REMAIN EXTREMELY POOR. WHILE THE OFDA-FUNDED PROJECT ALLEVIATED SOME OF THE IMMEDIATE MISERY FOLLOWING THE FIRE, SUBSTANTIALLY MORE RESOURCES ARE NECESSARY TO MEET BASIC HUMAN NEEDS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GVN'S DECISION TO RESETTLE PEOPLE IN THE U MINH THUONG NATIONAL PARK'S BUFFER ZONE RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF THE PARK'S CONSERVATION MANDATE. END COMMENT.

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